

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
October 25, 2006**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dick Hosking for Sam Lewis, Chairperson

Dave Wulfson	Paul Guare
George Barrett	C. J. "Mike" Coates
Charles Hunter	Rep. Bill Aswad
Richard Moulton	Rep. Albert Sonny Audette
John Cook	Eric Bohn
William McCormick	

OTHERS PRESENT: Charlie Miller, VTrans Rail Operations Section
Chris Andreasson, Vermont Transit
Anthony Otis, Railroad Association of Vermont
Clay Poitras, VTrans
J. Jeff Munger, Sen. Jeffords Office
Sen. Hull Maynard, Legislature
Susan Clark, VTrans
Polly McMartry, VTrans
Mary Anne Michaels, Vermont Railway
Matt Levin, Vermonters for a Clean Environment
Paul Craven
Ron Blenis, Parsons Brinkerhoff
Norman Forde, Colorado Railcar Manufacturing

1. Call to Order & Approval of Minutes

Dick Hosking in the absence of Sam Lewis called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. Introductions were made. Transportation Secretary Neale Lunderville addressed the Rail Council, mentioning his recent field trip with Vermont Railway to view rail issues first hand (286,000 pound rail, bridge work, tunnel work). Mr. Lunderville stated the next step is planning for 315,000 pound rail and transload facilities. The commitment to rail is there. The key is to expend funds in the most appropriate manner for freight and passenger service. Advice from the Rail Council is welcomed. Mr. Lunderville stressed the need to keep the Rail Council robust and vibrant as it is presently.

Mike Coates expressed appreciation for the comments and the orientation by Vermont Railway. Mr. Coates spoke in support of having the Rail Council meet more frequently than every other month to more fully and effectively assist the Rail Division with rail issues.

Rep. Sonny Audette gave kudos to Secretary Lunderville for his effort to get educated on rail issues.

Approval of Minutes of August 23, 2006

MOTION by Mike Coates, SECOND by John Cook, to approve the 8/23/06 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

2. Status of Twin State Railroad

Dick Hosking reported matters involving Twin State Railroad are in the hands of attorneys at this point. There is no further report at this time.

3. State Rail and Policy Plan Update

The Rail Council received a schedule of completion for the Rail Plan and the draft Executive Summary. Ron Blenis, consultant, reviewed the schedule, noting comments must be received by 11/3/06. The final draft will be posted on 11/15/06 and a public meeting scheduled on 11/20/06. The final report will be ready by 12/15/06 for approval by the Secretary of Transportation. Dave Wulfson asked about the priorities identified by the Infrastructure Subcommittee. Charlie Miller pointed out the priorities are noted on pages 6 and 7 in the Executive Summary. Jeff Munger asked about the reference to 263,000 cars in Table ES-1. Ron Blenis explained some bridges in the state are not up to the current standard of 263,000 pound rail. The next step is to build to 286,000 pound rail. Charlie Miller added the reference is relative to track speed.

Dave Wulfson questioned the increase by 3% in the bridge meeting line requirement. Mr. Blenis clarified the increase of 3% is in the number of bridges each year that meet the line requirements. Dick Hosking said the target is realistic based on funding. Rick Moulton pointed out the degradation of bridges is greater than 3% so the vision should be set higher, perhaps 10%. Mr. Hosking explained the percentage must be considered relative to priority and non-priority routes due to limited funding. Mr. Wulfson countered at 3% the goal is set low due to funding, but the need is not being met so the goal is not appropriate. There was further discussion of setting a satisfactory and meaningful goal for bridges. Charles Hunter stated the work is actually repairs to bring bridges up to current standards. Rep. Audette pointed out the percentage should be ahead of the deterioration rate each year. Charlie Miller observed most of the deterioration is due to previously unused lines being used more aggressively now. Staff is working on a program to demonstrate clearly where the rail lines are now, where they should be, and the cost to bridge the gap. The information will be provided to the legislature. Dave Wulfson interjected the Rail Plan should provide the information just mentioned by Mr. Miller. Ron Blenis stated the plan is a guideline of how rail work will be prioritized and rated. Charlie Miller stated in the next two years, the state will be doing \$7 million in bridge work. Following further discussion, the Rail Council wanted reconsideration of the bridge meeting line percentage. Matters that should be part of the consideration include route priority, condition of the bridge (maintenance, deterioration), yield capacity of the rail (below 263,000 pounds is a problem), and incoming revenues (completion of the Bellows Falls Tunnel should yield increased revenue on the line). The information should be provided to the legislature as soon as possible. Dick Hosking urged legislation directing all revenue from rail operations into the rail program rather than into the Transportation Fund.

Paul Guare stressed there must be a distinction between construction and the planning program. Charlie Miller stated hopefully the planning program will work into construction. Mr. Miller explained many of the bridge projects are not complex (they are short bridges and being done four and five at a time as one project). The number of bridges to be done (128) sounds like a lot, but the state was behind to begin with and now good headway is being made.

Rick Moulton suggested better enumeration of service from Rutland to Burlington be provided. Dave Wulfson suggested the final report reflect current conditions. Matt Levin stated the document does not provide specifics relative to promoting the environmental quality of rail. There are no goals or targets on promoting environmental stewardship through the use of rail. Mr. Levin urged more language to this end in the Executive Summary since promoting environmental quality is one of the five key issues quoted in the document. Mr. Levin stated each project is looked at on its own merits from an environmental standpoint. Rick Moulton suggested tracking environmental improvements, such as the number of trucks taken off the road due to rail transport of freight and the gains of allowing through freight. Mike Coates suggested the legislature be shown the cost to ship by truck versus rail from an environmental point of view. Matt Levin urged the actual benefits of rail be shown in the Executive Summary not the hypothetical benefits. Mr. Levin is pointed out the benefits are noted in a larger sense, not per individual projects. If a project is large enough, an environmental study will be required. Charlie Miller stated if federal funds are used on a project, an environmental impact study must be done. Rick Moulton suggested a general statement could be made as part of the vision or mission statement to speak to the capacity of the rail system in Vermont if it runs efficiently to take trucks off the roads. Staff will take the comments under consideration. Further comments on the rail plan must be submitted to the Rail Division prior to November 3, 2006.

4. Project Updates

Continuous Welded Rail from Vergennes to Charlotte

Work is ongoing.

Proctorsville

Work on hold. Crew working on other tasks.

Connecticut River Line Tie Replacement between Newport and Wells River

Work is ongoing.

Center Rutland Project

Ethan Allen Express running time will be decreased with the completion of this project.

Bellows Falls Tunnel

Work is progressing and on schedule to accommodate modified double stack cars in December.

Pine Street Bridge in Rutland

Contract awarded. Work to begin in spring. Contracts are being worked for other bridge projects in the state as well.

Newbury Bridge

Materials have been acquired. Replacement will begin in the spring.

Parker Hill Bridge in Rockingham

Scoping report will be done for a new bridge on alignment.

Clearance on NECR from St. Albans south

New England Central Railroad expects double stack cars on the line by March/April, 2007.

Middlebury Rail Spur

Environmental impact statement is in process. Record of Decision expected in the spring then a consultant will be hired to do the design. The FHWA will use the \$30 million earmark for the Route 7 crossing over the track. It was suggested the VTrans Program Development Director, Rich Tatro, brief the Rail Council at the next meeting on the Middlebury rail spur project process and what is being considered for the design/build. George Barrett suggested the Middlebury rail spur project be included in the Rail Plan and the environmental positives be highlighted. Dick Hosking reiterated the Rail Plan is a road map, not a construction plan. Rep. Audette expressed concern about earmarked federal funds being in place for the project since money has been borrowed from earmarks to make up the shortfall in the Transportation Fund in the past. Jeff Munger assured federal funds that are earmarked must be available for use as specified. Dick Hosking added the money must be available, though it may be necessary to add funds to cover the full cost of the project. With highway projects, borrowing against an earmark is allowed, but the money must be returned to the project when the funds are received. Charlie Miller explained funding can be moved on projects in a program, but it is moved within the same authorization.

Rutland Rail Yard

The Rutland Redevelopment Authority has not filled the position previously held by Matt Sternberg. VTrans will finish the EIS in house and once the Record of Decision is in hand, a development plan will be drafted.

5. Passenger Rail Update**a) Amtrak Operating Agreement, Ridership**

Charlie Miller reported the current contract with Amtrak has been extended to November 30, 2006. A revised contract will be ready for signature by mid-November. Amtrak is performing well in Vermont. There was strong growth in ridership except in September due to construction when riders had to be bussed. According to Amtrak, CSX in November will be doing track work so passengers will have to be bussed. VTrans is working to resolve the situation without bussing passengers the entire route. A press release on bussing during construction on the Amtrak route will be published.

There has been a schedule change on the Ethan Allen Express (running later out of Rutland) which alleviates any impediment on the freight run. Dick Hosking stated the rail project in center Rutland and the crossing on Route 4A should improve on-time performance by Amtrak. There was mention of Amtrak passengers currently being bussed from Whitehall to Rutland due to a problem with the crew. Charlie Miller will investigate the matter.

b) DMU Status

Charlie Miller reported work continues on supplying the Joint Fiscal Committee with the required information and analysis on DMU cars by the meeting on November 9, 2006. It is hoped direction on how to proceed will result from the meeting. Norman Forde with Colorado Railcar Manufacturing was introduced.

6. Other Business

Next Infrastructure Subcommittee Meeting

December 7, 2006, 10 a.m.

Appointment to Rail Council

The Rail Council wanted confirmation that Charles Hunter, NECR, was appointed a member of the Rail Council.

Rail Day

Rick Moulton reported Rail Day was not held in 2006, but will be held in June, 2007 at the Bellows Falls Tunnel.

Gateway Rural Infrastructure Improvement Pilot (GRIP)

Staff has been meeting with GRIP to help get financial and management controls in place to be eligible for funding.

Rail Council Meeting Monthly

Sam Lewis reported meeting every month does not provide staff with enough time to adequately prepare for the next meeting. Mike Coates suggested the Rail Council meet more frequently when necessary. The matter can be further discussed.

7. Next Meeting/Agenda

Next Meeting: December 7, 2006, 1 p.m. – 4 p.m., Montpelier

Agenda Items: Rick Tatro, VTrans Program Development
Update from GRIP

8. Adjournment

MOTION by George Barrett, SECOND by John Cook, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 p.m.